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SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR NEA/ELA, AF/E, EUR

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SUBJECT: EGYPT ANXIOUS TO ENGAGE ON PIRACY AND SOMALIA

REF: A. PARIS 2140
¶B. STATE 125514

Classified By: Minister Counselor for Economic and Political Affairs
William R. Stewart for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) Summary: The Egyptian MFA's point man on Somalia told us on November 24 that Egypt wants to collaborate with the USG to address the growing piracy issue in the region. Egypt is looking for direction from the U.S. on areas for potential cooperation and prefers that Saudi Arabia be included in the joint efforts. The Government of Egypt (GOE) believes the piracy issue cannot be resolved without addressing the conditions in Somalia and would like to remain in close contact with the USG to develop a coordinated strategy for Somalia. Separately, the Egyptian Navy received VADM Gortney's invitation to coordinate on anti-piracy and to meet in mid-January, but has not yet responded. End Summary.

¶2. (SBU) Ambassador Abdelhameed Marzouk, MFA Deputy Assistant Minister for South and East Africa told ECPO MinCouns November 24 that Egypt is "more concerned" than others about piracy because of the direct threat to Suez Canal revenues. He said Egypt is keenly aware of international shipping companies sending their ships around Africa noting that piracy is "harmful to Egypt's economy." Marzouk stressed that the GOE is interested in finding a way to cooperate with U.S. on the piracy issue. He said that the GOE would appreciate a formal list from the USG on areas where the two countries can "coordinate efforts" and "prepare for the next steps" to address piracy in the region.

¶3. (C) Marzouk felt that the GOE would be more comfortable if the U.S. also involved Saudi Arabia in the regional efforts to combat piracy. He stated that the Saudis are "angry" after the hijacking of the supertanker Sirius Star, and are concerned about piracy. Marzouk said that both Egypt and Saudi Arabia are "strategic" countries in the Red Sea area and assessed both would be interested in "joint participation" with the United States to combat piracy. He expressed interest in exploring options for military operations, but stressed that should Egypt decide to interoperate with counter-piracy efforts, it would insist on no public acknowledgment of its military role.

Concerned with Scope of EU Naval Operations

¶4. (C) Marzouk told us the GOE is "confused" by the comments

of the Commander of the French Navy in the Indian Ocean, which appear to have expanded the geographical scope of the EU operations with a "mandate to work to the Suez Canal" (reftel A). He said the GOE's position is that there was no reason to take this action because there have been no piracy incidents in the Red Sea, and the security of the Red Sea should be left to the littoral states. Marzouk said that Egypt was considering a "more active role," but no decision has been made yet to send Egyptian units to the entrance to the Red Sea.

Tackling the Problem on Land

¶ 15. (C) Marzouk emphasized the need to tackle the situation in Somalia as essential to resolving the piracy issue, and he said that Egypt and the US need to agree on whom and whom not to approach in Somalia. Marzouk dismissed Transitional Federal Government (TFG) officials, whom he said are only interested in money, fighting with one another, and spending time outside the country. He repeated a request, which he made at last week's Quintet meetings (septel), seeking USG direction on to how to resolve the situation on land without engaging the Shebaab and Islamic Courts. Marzouk told us that although Egypt does not approve of the groups' ideologies, they are "very strong players" and the GOE believes it should talk and negotiate with all parties in Somalia who can help to resolve the situation on the ground.

¶ 16. (C) Marzouk denounced Eritrean President Afwerki as a "devil" for his support of the Shebaab. He said that Afwerki's goal is for "Ethiopia to leave Somalia in disgrace." Marzouk stated that Eritrea's "revenge-focused policy," is further damaging the situation in Somalia. He asked if the USG could act to "neutralize the effect of Eritrea or influence Afwerki into not supporting the hardliners." Marzouk told us that despite Eritrea's negative role in the region, the GOE invited it to participate in the Red Sea States conference on piracy, held in Cairo, on November 20. However, Eritrea decided not to attend.

¶ 17. (C) Comment: The GOE is concerned with the decision by some shipping lines to circumvent the Suez Canal. This risks a portion of the over USD 5 billion in canal revenues and may force Egypt to become more active in dealing with the piracy issue. Egypt's eagerness to work with the USG on piracy and Somalia appear to be sincere. Still, Egypt clearly prefers not take the lead on coordinating a joint strategy, and clearly seeks the cover of Saudi Arabia and others in region before acting.

SCOBET